Part 1. How to Recover from Injuries and Inactivity

QUESTION. What do sedentary adults have in common with Astronauts and Athletes?

ANSWER. When Astronauts are in outer space, they experience a change in their muscles – a loss of “muscle mass”.

The phenomenon of “losing muscle” from dis-use is called sarcopenia or muscle wasting.

Muscle loss also occurs when athletes get hurt, AND -- it happens to people who lead sedentary lives.

Loss of muscle has a number of causes. Inactivity contributes to muscle loss over time and can result in osteoporosis, postural instability, diminished fine motor control, and impaired performance in simple Activities of Daily Living (Aagard et al, 2010).

• While Astronauts enter their space capsules in top-notch physical condition, it is very difficult for them to keep their strength in a weightless environment.
• Athletes who are injured and people who were once physically active but stop, also experience muscle atrophy… this goes along with the “use it or lose it” phenomenon you have likely heard of.

Research indicates that it is common to experience anywhere from 30% - 40% loss in skeletal muscle and associated muscular strength between 25 and 80 years of age (Fontera, et al, 2000). In addition to the normal muscle loss people experience over a lifetime, sedentary individuals experience much more muscle loss. According to Orem (1995), a universal self-care need is the ability to avoid hazards and maintain normalcy because the functional consequences of inactivity, injury and/or illness are many.

So, what do we know about bouncing back from long periods of inactivity, injury and/or illness?

Are you currently injured?
Have you found yourself “out of shape?”
Either is quite NORMAL!
Kluge’s Korner

Bouncing Back: How to get off the sidelines and back into the game

Injury or illness can lead to “disruption of self.” Sometimes we doubt that we will get back to our former self. Research done by Brock & Kleiber (1994) found that injury undercuts one’s sense of dignity. Sometimes we even experience shame and guilt.

Whether temporary or permanent, losing an ordinary state of being and acquiring a devalued position -- that of “injured,” “ill,” or “disabled” can result in the stigmatization. As Mike, a football player who got injured said, “All of a sudden, you’re standing on the outside looking in. You feel kind of lost for a while… like I was something less than before.”

Getting injured or not being able to maintain former fitness levels is NORMAL. What is important is the ability to RECOVER. You have known people who got sick or hurt and recovered. You also know people who got sick or hurt and never recovered.

What contributes to RECOVERY?

A study by Kempen et al (2003) examined the role of pre-injury health status and perceived control in recovery from fall-related injuries in adults 57-88 years of age. 165 people in their study incurred a variety of injuries -- fractures of the wrist/forearm; ankle/foot; and hip; as well as sprains and dislocations. Study participants were assessed BEFORE any injuries occurred and 8 weeks, 5 months, and 1 year after injury.

FINDINGS: Participants who recovered fully after 1-year had TWO important CHARACTERISTICS:

1. Good health status, including average to above average physical fitness levels prior to injury
2. The expectation that they would fully recovery or be able to cope with necessary losses.

How can we keep as much strength as possible so WHEN WE DO incur an injury or illness, we can bounce back?

While there are no guarantees to full recovery, having some experience and a comfort level with physical activity contributes to the likelihood of recovery. Almost all treatment protocols include getting and keeping people moving post-injury or illness.

*SEE Part 2 STRENGTH TRAINING [& Explanatory Style]